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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Weather-wise, this has been the worst summer in about 10 years! I recently saw some graphics on the local news that showed a calendar of the month of August. On it, there were mostly colored squares that reflected the days of the month. There were only three squares that were not colored, reflecting those days in which we've had no rain. This is August, the down side of the peak of summer! Fortunately, all of these days were not washouts!

I don't know about you, but there are a lot of the Summer Olympics that I enjoy watching. Sure, I've seen a little bit of the swimming events, but mostly to see Michael Phelps shatter Mark Spitz's records. I've seen a little bit of the women's gymnastics routines, and I'm amazed. And I really enjoyed the women's beach volleyball matches! Otherwise, I haven't seen too much else - just not the best time of the day for viewing. And it was funny to learn of the Chinese's version of the Milli Vanilli lip-synching scandal! Poor kid...

On a more serious and somber note, I had a phone message early in the week. Now, most phone messages I get are usually people soliciting money for a worthwhile organization, but mostly some telemarketing garbage. But this call had been one of a personal nature.

I've been using Atari computers for over 20 years now, but not so much in the recent past. I've met a lot of people who have shared my enthusiasm for Atari computing - through local user groups, bulletin boards, online services, dealers, and Atari shows. One of my closest Atari friends, Harry Steele, passed away last week. Now, some of you long-time Atari users may have known Harry. He ran the Boston Computer Society's Atari BBS for many years. In fact, Harry was very active in the local Boston area Atari BBS community. He spent countless hours helping me to set up my own Atari BBS - Toad Hall EBBS back in the late 80's. He also helped me a LOT when I had computer problems. And, Harry was the one to convince me to attend my first Atari fest: WAACE, in 1990. It was that year that Harry decided to take the lead to bring an Atari fest to the Boston area. The Boston Computer Society (BCS) was the premier computing organization around the country, and it had sponsored numerous shows for other computer platforms over the years. So, why not an Atari show? I joined that organizing group, and getting that show set up was a lot of fun. And, we managed to pull it off, scheduled a couple of weeks after that year's WAACE show - the New England AtariFest '90 was a huge success!

During those years after that show, I had become one of many vocal people online complaining about Atari's lackluster performance. Most

of my vocalizations were online in the Atari Roundtables on GEnie, in the Atari SIGs on CompuServe, and in the ST Advantage area of Delphi. Additionally, I had a lot to say in my columns during my many-year stint as the Atari editor of STReport. I didn't make a lot of friends at Atari during those years, and it almost came back to haunt me.

The BCS, staying with the Harry Steele factor, had also played major roles hosting annual meetings where new top-notch equipment made their debut. Again, Harry wanted to see the Atari segment of the BCS back in the forefront with a focus on new Atari technology. By then, I had also joined the BCS due to years of Harry's prodding. We all knew that Atari was working on their new power machine, the Atari Falcon! What a better place to introduce it to the world than at the annual BCS meeting. Harry, along with a few of us in the BCS Atari group started a campaign to get Sam Tramiel to come to Boston to introduce the Falcon. With Harry's lead in this, we pulled it off - the new Atari Falcon was introduced in the heart of Boston!

While this was a huge success for the New England Atari community, there was an interesting side note to this event. You see, by that time, my affiliation with STReport had made me not one of Atari's favorite people. When Atari's director of communications, Bob Brodie, learned that I was part of the group helping out with the Falcon meeting, things started to sour. Under no circumstances, Sam Tramiel, through Brodie, would allow me to be involved with this showing. But Harry Steele was a long-time friend, and fellow BCS member. This was a BCS-sponsored occasion, and Harry let Brodie know, in no certain terms, that I had been a strong proponent of Atari computing - regardless of my opinions of the company and some of its staff. Through Harry's insistence, I remained on the organizing staff, helped with the set-up and breakdown of the meeting, and even attended the after-show dining festivities (and sat at Brodie's table!)!

Over the years, even as Atari's existence was fading (okay, dying), Harry and I would still talk about Atari things. But Harry's enthusiasm for Atari computing faded, like many before him. We would go golfing about a half dozen times a year, but that started to decline also. We'd meet over the years, for a beer and pizza, an occasional round of golf, or even just to chit-chat and reminisce. We still exchanged cards over the holidays, but other than that, I haven't seen or talked to Harry in about 3-4 years. So, when I got the call from his daughter-in-law, I was surprised. Part of the message stated that Harry had left specific instructions to call a small list of people to let them know upon his death. And I appreciate being among those on that list, even if it meant hearing that Harry was gone.

Harry, you were always a character! Although I've said it many times over the years, I appreciated all of the help and support you provided me in all things Atari. And, I'm grateful for the opportunity to be, and have you as, a friend. RIP.

Until next time...

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TeraDesk 3.97 Released

Version 3.97 of TeraDesk open-source desktop for the 16-bit and 32-bit lines of Atari computers is available at:

http://solair.eunet.yu/~vdjole/teradesk.htm

This release brings fixes to some not-very-critical problems that have been detected, and also a couple of small cosmetic improvements. Work on some other fixes and improvements is in progress. See the development history file for details.

Have fun.

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, I'm sure your not surprised, but there aren't enough messages on the UseNet to make up a good column. I'll put 'em aside to go with next week's.

So I guess you're going to have to put up with my ranting and raving about whatever comes to mind.

Have you been watching the Olympics? I don't know about you, but I'm just blown away by some of the people competing this time around. Look at Michael Phelps. He's a damned machine. He's just going nuts out there, grabbing up all the medals and most of the limelight. Well, I'll tell ya what. He deserves it.

I'll let you in on a little secret... Phelps ticks me off. Who the heck does he think he is, standing there poolside yelling and shouting like a shirtless fool?

Ha! He's the guy who's won more gold medals at one Olympics than any other American, that's who. After his years of training and discipline, he's allowed. [grin]

While it's true that he's trained hard and been smart about everything that he's done (diet, equipment, etc.), perhaps the biggest asset the man has is his overall physical attributes: He's 6'4" tall with more torso than leg, which makes him more 'stable' in the water, he's got big feet and hands to grab as much water as possible, he's got double-jointed shoulders and elbows to allow him to hyper-extend to get those baseball mitts of his as big a stroke as possible, and he's focused enough and disciplined enough to stick to an exercise regimen that would cripple most of us. It's because of his training and particular physical attributes that he can give his all in each and every race without losing as much of his edge as the rest of us would.

Heck, the kid's body (and he's 23 years old... he IS a kid) is in

perpetual overdrive. He consumes somewhere around 12,000 calories a day as opposed to the 2,000 calories the rest of us burn. Between that and the fact that his heart pumps twice as much blood as ours do when he's pushing his body to the limit, he seems to be able to minimize the incredible strain on his system. As much as I hate to admit it, the guy deserves every accolade he's getting.

I've got a couple of other favorites too... of course, being a red-blooded American male, they're women.

Dara Torres. Now THERE'S a story. When qualifying for the Olympics, she broke a record that had stood for almost 25 years. Now, there's nothing so amazing about that, right? I mean, records are meant to be broken. Well friends and neighbors, what IS amazing is that it's a record that SHE set. Yeah, she set the record when she was fifteen years old... TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO! I don't know about you, but I find that amazing.

I saw a quick story on her workout regimen and, to be honest, I don't know if it'd all be worth it to me. The workouts, the grinding stretches and the electric-shock-type of stimulation that she goes through before and after the actual exercise must add up to a fairly painful warmup and cool-down. She's a shining example of what you can do if you've got the drive, the support and the talent. My hat's off to her.

There's been a lot said about the physics of the pool (designed to minimize resistance) and the uniforms (the skin-tight outfits that many of the swimmers are wearing these days) and how it's changing their sport. But the fact is that all the little fine-tuning touches to the pool and swimsuits only add up to fractions of a second difference. It's not like I can don the new Speedo (oh gawd, even _I'M_ grossed out by that thought) and jump into the pool in the Water Cube and give any of these guys a run for their money. But I'm still not at all sure that the suits don't constitute what some have called "equipment doping", since the suits are expensive (around $500.00 per), and at this point 9 out of 10 swimming records that have been broken at this Olympics have been broken by swimmers wearing them. But these people ARE the best of the best of the best, and I don't know if things would have been any different without the suits.

There are plenty of other sports that I'll be watching... track and field, the martial arts-related events (Judo, Taekwondo, Fencing, Boxing, Wrestling, etc.) and a bunch of others that I can't recall right at the moment, but I've got to admit that the one that catches my interest the most is gymnastics.

Now, guys in gymnastics is okay... the strength and agility they display is awe-inspiring, and the dedication that it takes to be that good at ANYTHING really blows my mind. But I've got to admit that everything else is a far-distant second to the women's gymnastics teams. It seems that all I can ever say while watching them is "wow!"

I'm not talking about just the Americans here, but every team I've seen... they're simply amazing. It's one thing to be able to do a tumble or whatever, but there's so much more than that going on, whether it's on the mat or parallel bars or pommel horse or rings. What they do, what the really good ones do, is about as close as you can get to physical poetry.

I have a niece who was 'into gymnastics' big-time. There was even talk

of a run at the Olympics. She was one of those kids who practiced because she wanted to, and she was incredibly good at it. But, because she was my niece, I got very nervous watching her on the parallel bars or high beam. I just kept thinking, "one wrong step or hand placement, and she’s looking at a cast and lots of therapy".

I just couldn’t understand why someone would do the things that I saw her doing. Things that seemed to defy both gravity and common sense. I finally asked her about it one day, after watching her do a series of awe-inspiring moves on the beam. Why? Why would anyone actually want to jump and spin and twirl and roll on a four inch wide piece of wood four feet in the air?

"Because" she told me through a huge dreamy smile, "when I’m there, I’m flying!"

Ah. NOW I understand. I guess the only way to describe it is that feeling you get when you dream that you can fly... not those annoying ones where you’re suspended in mid-air and are limited to jerky, uncertain, clumsy moves with the continual feeling that any second you’re going to plummet and hit the ground like a lawn dart, but the times when you swoop and dive and drift easily and everything seems right with the world... like there’s nothing you can’t do and everything is just perfect. Ahhhh, those times are few and far between, even in dreams. It’s no wonder then that my niece is so ’addicted’ to gymnastics. I can’t imagine ANYTHING that I could do while awake that could give me that feeling. She’s blessed enough with talent to be able to do that when she steps up to the mat or the parallel bars or the beam and let her talent, practice and concentration take over.

There seem to be painfully few talents that can lead to the type of rapture you can see on the faces of some of these ’kids’. Most things that difficult require concentration, and you can see it in the practitioner’s face... The determination, the drive, the concentration on form and detail.

But when you see a gymnast... a real, honest-to-goodness, natural born gymnast, there’s a different look on their face. Yeah, it’s that look you have in your dreams when you can fly.

Well, up, up and away, folks! That’s it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Stix: Motion-Control PC Games!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Nintendo Continues To Lead!

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Stix Takes A Stab at Motion-Controlled PC Games

Looking at its size, shape, white wrist strap and B-button on the bottom, it's easy to compare the Stix with the Wiimote, the wireless controller for the popular Nintendo gaming console. Except the Stix is for your PC.

The Stix comes from Playhut Inc., a toy company that also makes cute little indoor tents for kids. The Stix 200 remote, which began selling for $49.99 at Target, Costco and other retailers this week, promises to "redefine the PC and online gaming experience" with the motion-sensing controller.

A stab at some of the 2D casual games available on Sphere, the game portal of Playhut subsidiary GoLive2, offers a bit of novelty and fun, though nothing as exciting as scoring that first strike in Wii bowling.

For those who feel constrained by 2D games and want to do more than shake their Stix left and right, the company plans to release the Stix 400 for $59.99 in October (though it's already on sale on Amazon.com for a higher price.) The Stix 400 is compatible with 3D games and sounds more promising.

"Wowbotz Bomb Battle," a "Pong"-like game but with shields and bombs, is as simple as the 1970s arcade classic, with players moving their Stix up and down in front of the monitor to hit a bomb back and forth with their opponent.

"Kuttiez Wishing Well" lets your little witch character move left and right as well as up and down as you fall down a seemingly endless well. The object is to light up Jack-o-lanterns as you fall while avoiding flying ghosts.

Stix can work with any Web-based game, so long as either the player or the folks at GoLive2 map out the controls to translate them from the keyboard to the Stix remote. But it doesn't always work the other way around: To play "Bomb Battle," for example, you'll need Stix.

The Wii it isn't, but for the price of a tank of gas for an SUV it might give your wrists a welcome break from playing keyboard-and-mouse computer games.

Of course, if you already have a Wii you can always sync your Wiimote to your PC through Bluetooth and be done with it.

Nintendo Continues To Lead Game-Console Sales

U.S. sales of video-game consoles and software jumped 28 percent last

month compared to last year, according to market researcher NPD Group. Nintendo's DS portable and Wii remained the most popular systems.

For hardware, that means nearly $450 million in July purchases, a 17 percent increase compared to the same time last year. The top-selling DS moved about 608,000 units, with the Wii second at about 555,000.

The next four places showed small differences, with third-place Sony's PlayStation 3 at 225,000, its PlayStation Portable in fourth with 222,000, and Microsoft's Xbox 360 fifth with 205,000. The PlayStation 2, now entering late middle age eight years after its release, still sold about 155,000 for sixth place.

In total sales, the Wii is in first place, with about 13.5 million sold in North America and about 31 million worldwide. The Xbox 360 is in second place, with 12 million U.S. sales and 20 million worldwide, and the PS3 takes third with 5.5 million U.S. and 15 million worldwide.

Game software sales in the U.S. totaled $591 million, an increase of 41 percent over last year. The top two games were Electronic Arts' NCAA Football 09 for the Xbox, with 397,000 sold, and Nintendo's Wii Fit, with about 370,000. Guitar Hero: On Tour for the DS sold 309,000 for third place, and Wii Play was fourth with 284,000.

The remaining games in the top 10 were, in order, NCAA Football for the PS3, Soulcalibur IV for the Xbox 360, Mario Kart for the Wii, Rock Band Special Edition Bundle for the Wii, Soulcalibur IV for the PS3, and Sid Meier's Civilization Revolution for the Xbox 360.

Mike Goodman, an analyst with industry research firm Yankee Group, said it is "pretty safe to assume that Nintendo will continue to lead the way for the foreseeable future." The more interesting development, he added, is the continuing monthly battle between the PS3 and the Xbox 360, which in the U.S. is "still very close."

In the latest U.S. figures, he noted, "Sony has managed to inch ahead of Microsoft," but the Xbox 360 still leads in total sales since launch. "At this pace," Goodman said, "it will take Sony years to catch up with Microsoft."

Goodman said the PS3's built-in Blu-ray high-definition DVD player is "nice to have," but probably "not a must-have" that would sway buyers. The inclusion of Blu-ray in the PS3 delayed the release of the console, but became a possible asset after the recent Blu-ray triumph in the high-definition format war with HD DVD.

Goodman noted the monthly competition might be in for a shake-up if a rumored big price-cut for the Xbox 360 takes place this fall. If, he said, Microsoft were to drop $100 from the console price, the dynamic of the monthly sales race could dramatically shift once again.

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Some Web Sites Remain Blocked at Beijing Olympics

Some Web sites remained inaccessible to reporters as competition got under way Saturday at the Beijing Olympics.

China’s communist government routinely filters its citizens’ access to the Internet, but in the runup to the Olympics Chinese officials and officials with the International Olympic Committee vowed there would be no censorship of the Internet for accredited journalists covering the games.

Some sites were unblocked 10 days ago after reporters arriving to cover the games found them blocked and complained to the IOC, but others remain inaccessible, including sites related to the Tiananmen Square protests, Tibet, Taiwan and the Dalai Lama.

While searches for these keywords turned up long lists of Web sites, attempts to open some of them resulted in a message saying the page could not be displayed.

A search for information about the outlawed Falun Gong spiritual movement not only drew that error message but froze the search engine and prohibited further searches for several minutes. Sites that host thousands of blogs appeared to be open, but specific blogs remained blocked.

A statement by Chinese officials indicated they had gone as far as they intend to go.

"Yes, we promised to provide free access to the Internet - except for a few that would jeopardize our national security and would not be good for the healthy growth of our young people," said Wang Wei, executive vice president of BOCOG, the Olympic organizing committee.

"As in any other country, there are some kinds of limitations," Wang added. "However, I think we are going to provide sufficient access for the media to cover the games."

IOC spokeswoman Giselle Davies suggested reporters should keep pushing the Chinese.

"Sites that you need to have for your job, it’s important that you raise them for BOCOG’s awareness," Davies said. "It’s ongoing work."

Rebecca MacKinnon, who studies Internet censorship in mainland China, said none of the changes have affected Chinese-language sites.

"The censorship situation for those Web sites has not loosened at all," said MacKinnon, who teaches journalism at the University of Hong Kong. "From what I understand they have even tightened."

U.S. Fails To Prosecute Internet Fraud Cases

While Web users drown in spam and fend off scams aimed at stealing their money, U.S. federal and state law enforcement authorities are doing little to resolve what has become a multi-billion-dollar problem, a think tank said on Monday.

In the 20 states that give a number for consumer complaints, there were roughly 20,000 Internet-related complaints in 2007, said the group, which surveyed officials in all 50 states but received widely varying amounts of data.

Eight states put Internet-related complaints among their top-three consumer headaches in 2007 while 24 states had some form of online fraud in their top 10 complaints, according to the Center for American Progress (CAP), which worked with the Center for Democracy and Technology.

And the complaints are not unfounded; spyware, viruses and phishing cost consumers $7.1 billion in 2007, up from $2 billion the previous year, the report said.

Phishing is using e-mail to try to fraudulently get information like passwords or credit card numbers. Spyware is software installed on a computer without the owner’s consent. It can be used to monitor computer use, or take over the computer.

Paula Selis, senior counsel for the office of Washington state’s attorney general, warned that crime associated with the Internet could damage online commerce. "There must be a recognition that online fraud is a huge threat," she told reporters.

Despite the large number of complaints, the group found few prosecutions of online fraud.

"It’s clear ... that state attorneys general are not doing a whole lot about Internet consumer protection," Reece Rushing, CAP’s director of regulatory and information policy, said at a news conference. "They haven’t made it a priority. In the states that have made it a priority they’ve been able to win settlements."

The National Association of Attorneys General’s bimonthly Cybercrime Newsletter for 2006 and 2007 mentioned just 55 prosecutions of Internet fraud, 26 related to online sales or services, 15 related to data security or identity theft and 14 involving spyware, spam or phishing.

In 2007, Washington state sued Consumer Digital Services, accusing it of promising free goods in exchange for personal information. As a result, more than 13,000 Washington state consumers were charged $14.95 on their phone bills for Internet services they did not want. Under the settlement, the money is to be refunded and the company to pay penalties and fees that could total $1 million, the report said.

U.S. Not Ready for Georgia-Style Computer Attacks

While Internet attacks continue in Georgia, security experts say the U.S. is not prepared for similar attacks that could steal confidential data and wreak havoc on U.S. computer systems.

National intelligence officials earlier this year told a Senate

committee that unlike the U.S. military, the federal government and private sector are not prepared for cyber attacks and pointed to China and Russia as threats to consider. It wasn't the first time government officials cited China as a threat.

A 2007 Department of Defense report said the Chinese government sees cyber war as part of its first strike. Also last year, General James Cartwright, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said China is carrying out widespread reconnaissance of America's networks. Earlier this year, Chinese hackers attempted to take out CNN's Web site, according to CNN.

Scott Borg, director of the independent U.S. Cyber Consequences Unit, has blamed Russia for taking down about 20 Georgian government, banking and media sites. Borg said the U.S. is ready for physical attacks, but not from computer systems.

China and Russia "are the biggest single countries that provide a challenge to the U.S.," said Jose Nezario, a senior security researcher with Arbor Networks. "I would say they are closely matched in terms of capability and programming to be able to induce an attack against the U.S. through the Internet."

Russia is well equipped, according to Nezario. Arbor Networks has tracked Russian criminal groups attacking Web sites, files and other groups, netting millions of dollars. And there have been Web posts teaching residents of Russia ways to support the cause by initiating their own attacks.

In fact, Nezario watched the attack of a media outlet in Georgia during our interview from his office in Michigan. Nezario said no one is immune to these types of attacks.

Nezario and his colleagues began tracking a series of attacks in Georgia going back to mid-July, before military attacks began. Nezario said he noticed a stream of data directed at Georgian government sites containing the message win+love+in+Russia last month.

Georgia's presidential Web site is still inaccessible, possibly firewalled to thwart attacks or possibly still under attack by additional botnets, Nezario recently wrote in his blog. Botnets are compromised computers running software usually installed using worms, Trojan Horses, or backdoors. Nezario has been trying to discover who the attacker is.

"This has been a very, very powerful insight and we are learning who the botnets are and who are being told to attack and where those servers are and who is behind it," he said.

It's likely that Georgia, which has only 4.7 million people, does not have the hardware, tools or staff to defend against such attacks.

"I think because we have more people who are able to utilize more equipment, more operations, more connectivity, we are less vulnerable to this kind of attack - but we are not immune," Nezario said.

Both the frequency and size of the attacks has grown substantially. The largest attacks are between 20GB and 40GB per second, enough to disrupt any Internet service provider, according to Arbor Networks.

Google Resolves Gmail Access Problems

Google Inc said on Monday it has resolved an issue with its contacts system that caused many users of its Gmail service to have trouble accessing their online e-mail.

The problems began at about 5 p.m. EDT and an announcement on the company's Gmail "Help Center" site said the issue is now resolved.

Google said an outage in the contacts system used by Gmail prevented the e-mail system from loading properly. The company also said that there may be minor delays in deliveries even though all mail is safe.

Users across the United States, Canada and India reported problems with Gmail and a Google employee also reported that the company's own corporate e-mail account was down.

Microsoft Calls for More IE8 Beta Testers

As Microsoft readies another beta release of Internet Explorer (IE) 8, the company has made a call for more beta testers via a company blog.

On the IEBlog this week, Microsoft Program Manager Allison Burnett said the company is expanding the IE 8 beta-testing program.

Currently, the only way to directly file a bug with the IE team is if someone is a part of the IE 8 technical beta program on Microsoft Connect. Now, if people want to contribute IE8 bug reports, they can e-mail Microsoft at IESO@microsoft.com, Burnett wrote. She also requested that people sending e-mails explain why they would be a "great beta tester."

Microsoft is expected to release another beta of IE8, the next version of its browser software, this month.

Microsoft released the first beta of IE8 in March at its MIX 08 conference. The company plans to add more support for industry standard protocols, such as CSS (Cascading Style Sheets), in the browser and has responded to developer feedback that it needs to bring them in to test IE8 as much as possible so they can prepare Web sites for these changes.

Microsoft made IE 7, the current version of its browser, more standards compliant when it was released in October 2006. However, many Web sites that had been developed to work with older versions of IE that did not support open standards did not work on IE7 and had to be recoded. Microsoft hopes to avoid a similar problem with IE8.

Microsoft plans to release the final code for IE8 before the end of the year.

Hackers Hacked at Infamous DefCon Gathering

In the end, it was hackers at DefCon that got hacked.

After three days of software cracking duels and hacking seminars, self-described computer ninjas at the infamous gathering in Las Vegas found out Sunday that their online activities were hijacked without them catching on.

A standing-room crowd cheered admiringly as Tony Kapela and Alex Pilosov showed them how they were "pwned" by a simple technique that could be used to "steal the Internet."

"Pwned" is popular computer and video game culture slang playing off the word "owned" and is used to describe someone being totally dominated or humiliated online or in-game.

"It’s a nearly invisible exploitation," Kapela said while revealing a hack that exploits fundamental Internet routing procedure to hijack online traffic unnoticed. "A level of invisibility that is unparalled."

The beauty of the technique presented by Alex Pilosov and Kapela is that hackers don’t need to break into websites or plant malicious computer code to control and tamper with data travelling the Internet, the presentation showed.

Instead, the Internet is duped into sending people’s data to hackers.

"Someone can passively intercept traffic," Kapela explained. "We can store, drop, filter, mutilate, grope, or modify data heading to you."

The tens of thousands of networks handling traffic on the Internet are programmed to trust each other for the best routes for data.

The choice of optimal routes is made instantly; decided by a network claiming the longest numerical Internet addresses for data destination.

A hacker can hijack traffic to and from websites of choice by adding enough numbers to computer addresses to have his or her network automatically deemed the best path for the data.

"We construct the man-in-the-middle attack on the Internet," Kapela said, referring to a classic hack in which someone gets between a computer user and their online destination.

"Internet routing is inherently trust based. We told the route that we know the best way to an address. A hacker could blast a lot of spam or launch a lot of phishing attacks."

Kapela and Pilosov proved their point by displaying for the rapt audience email, online searches and other online activity conducted that afternoon on the Internet connection used by DefCon attendees.

Hackers could use the attack to block access to websites or send traffic to bogus Web pages crafted to look like legitimate websites such as Twitter or Google, according to Kapela.

"Imagine all the wonderful stuff you could insert," Kapela said. "You can hijack stuff from China or the opposite. It may already be happening. Who could tell?"

The presentation capped a DefCon gathering attended by more than 8,000 people.

Hackers shared ways to crack everything from mobile telephones, computer games and social networking websites to electronic hospital records and high security locks used at the White House.

One seminar included a way to remotely turn off pacemakers regulating people’s heartbeats.

A cavernous room was devoted to a non-stop "capture the flag" contest in which players hunched over laptop computers battled to seize and keep control of a network set up for the game.

Nightly "Hacker Jeopardy" drinking games required teams of players to correctly answer geeky computer questions with those giving wrong responses punished by having to guzzle beer.

Another contest challenged hackers to slip malicious software code past increasingly sophisticated anti-virus programs.

Hackers also faced off in lock picking contests; Guitar Hero video game competitions, and computer simulated shooting used by police for firearms training.

Hackers also competed in making spy balloons that floated above the casinos.

Court Says Copyrights Apply Even for Free Software

In a crucial win for the free software movement, a federal appeals court has ruled that even software developers who give away the programming code for their works can sue for copyright infringement if someone misappropriates that material.

The decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in Washington, D.C., helps clarify a murky area of the law concerning how much control programmers can exert over their intellectual property once it’s been released for free into the so-called "open source" software community.

People are free to use that material in their own products, but they must credit the original authors of the programming code and release their modifications into the wild as well, a cycle that’s critical for free software to continue improving.

Because the code was given away for free, thorny questions emerge when a violation has been discovered and someone is found to have shoved the code into their own for-profit products without giving anything back, in the form of attribution and disclosure of the alterations they made.

In the latest case, which involved a computer application that model-train enthusiasts use to program the chips that control their trains, the U.S. District Court in San Francisco ruled that the plaintiff could sue for breach of contract but not copyright infringement.

The distinction is important because it’s easier to recover monetary

damages in a copyright-infringement case.

Robert Jacobsen, who manages an open source software group that created an application he claims was infringed, sought an injunction against KAM Industries, which makes a competing product. The lower court denied Jacobsen’s motion. The appeals court vacated that ruling Wednesday and returned the case to the district court.

"Traditionally, copyright owners sold their copyrighted material in exchange for money," the court said. "The lack of money changing hands in open source licensing should not be presumed to mean that there is no economic consideration, however."

Yahoo’s Fire Eagle Draws Fire From Privacy Advocates

Yahoo’s recently launched Fire Eagle has privacy advocates burning up about the new open platform that allows users to show their location on the Web and also allows developers access to users’ locations.

Yahoo officials insisted control is in the hands of the users. Users may decide how much they want to expose about their location, including the country, state, city and even street address.

"Location presents some unique challenges, and people inherently feel creepy when content is targeted to where they are and your actual physical location is being tracked," said Alison Cooper, chief computer scientist at the Center for Democracy and Technology. "If people know this is being shared, then people will react more strongly and protect themselves."

While Fire Eagle users control information about their location, privacy advocates say privacy policies for third-party developers may differ from Yahoo’s, leaving users confused and open to privacy breeches.

Ted Morgan, founder and CEO of Skyhook Wireless and the brain behind Loki, one of the 50 third-party developers using Fire Eagle, agrees that there is room for user confusion. But he said companies are adopting a general approach to privacy and offer similar policies.

If users opt out of Fire Eagle, previously collected information can be kept by the developers offering the service through their applications.

Morgan said Loki offers users a delete-history option and Fire Eagle users also have the option to hide their location and delete all their data from the databases.

"It’s great that application providers are informing people and have robust controls, but its important for people to realize if they turn it off for one application, they are not turning off their whole device," Cooper said.

Companies, especially those that have spent decades building their brand, are not going to risk losing the trust of customers and risk hurting their brand, Morgan said.

"Everyone has a vested interest in protecting privacy because the second consumers have any negative concerns about this, they’ll shut all of

this off," Morgan said. "I would argue that the industry is going over the top in privacy and in offering controls because everyone is so concerned that if someone's location is used against them in a bad way, they'll lose people's trust."

Yahoo officials say third-party developers must disclose to users how they will use the location data, and Yahoo has the ability to shut down applications misusing the service.

"Yahoo has always taken the security and privacy of our users as a paramount concern," said Andrew Schmitt, a Yahoo spokesperson. "In this regard, Fire Eagle is revolutionary in its treatment of user data, hoping to extend and lead industry standards regarding the users' control of their information ... should a user report a problem with a particular application, we reserve the right to alert our users and disable the application across our user base."

Cooper said users signing on to location social-network sites need to be aware and do some digging. The devices we carry around with us can easily be used to find us because of GPS, Wi-Fi and cell phones that can be triangulated, she said.

"With the proliferation of these services, it is good for people to look at what carriers offer and devices offer," Cooper added.

Although the first generation of applications focused on social networking or the family location space, as more people view more content on mobile phones and other devices, interest in location-based advertising is expected to grow.

Morgan said Loki and Fire Eagle will help provide more targeted choices for individuals. "If you are doing a search for something, it can show you ads from destinations around you rather than retailers in other parts of the country," he said. "Knowing someone's location also tells you a bit abut their demographics, income levels, and books they may be interested in."

"It's certainly viewed as a treasure trove for the market, and marketers are already looking at that, but the value has not yet been proven," Cooper said.

California Lawmakers Consider Cyberbullying Bill

School bullies who use the Internet or text messaging to harass fellow students could be kicked out of school under a bill being considered by the California Legislature.

Assembly Bill 86, introduced by Assemblyman Ted Lieu of Torrance, passed the Senate on Monday by a 21-11 vote and now heads back to the Assembly for consideration of Senate amendments, according to an Associated Press report. If the Assembly approves the Senate amendments, the bill will be sent to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Lieu's bill would allow students to be suspended or expelled from school for bullying that occurs via electronic communication, including cell phones, computers, or pagers.

Experts say the biggest obstacle to combating cyberbullying is that children are unlikely to report it. Unlike real-life bullying, there is often no witness or physical scar to alert parents or teachers to a cyberbullying situation.

The issue came to national focus last year when a newspaper reported the details a cyberbullying incident in which a teenage girl committed suicide. Megan Meier, who had a history of depression, hanged herself in 2006 after a falling out with someone named "Josh" whom she thought was a 16-year-old boy on MySpace. As it turns out, "Josh" didn't exist; the persona was allegedly created by a woman named Lori Drew, the mother of one of Meier's former friends, to harass the girl.

In November, Meier's hometown of Dardenne Prairie, Mo., passed a law banning online harassment. Offenders can face up to 90 days in jail, a $500 fine, or both.

U.S. Internet Speeds Drop to 15th Worldwide

The U.S. may be winning world speed records in swimming at the Olympics, but not in average Internet speeds. According to a new report, the country that invented the Internet has now sunk to 15th worldwide in the percentage of the population subscribing to broadband.

According to the recently released Second Annual Speed Matters report from the Communications Workers of America (CWA), the U.S. has "not made significant improvements in the speeds at which residents connect to the Internet" over the past year, and continues to fall behind other countries.

The report said about 230,000 people in all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, went to the speedmatters.org site to take an Internet speed test, and those results were used to determine the average speeds overall. The results indicated that the median download speed in the U.S. was 2.3 megabits per second. Japan was 30 times faster, with a median download speed of 63 Mpbs.

Other countries ahead of the U.S. include South Korea at 49 Mbps, Finland at 21 Mbps, France at 17 Mbps, and Canada at 7.6 Mbps. The reports notes that the average Japanese can download an entire movie in about two minutes, but it can take two hours or more here. The access cost in both countries, according to the Speed Matters report, is the same.

But the speed issue affects more than just how fast you can download movies, the report says. Innovations in telemedicine, education, public safety, and home-based businesses can be hindered by the lack of widespread high-speed connections.

The U.S. median upload speed was only 435 kilobits per second, the CWA said, "far too slow for patient monitoring or to transmit large files such as medical records."

The growth rate of average download speeds is slow, the report said. The increase beween the 2007 report and this year's was only four-tenths of a megabit per second, from 1.9 Mbps average to 2.3. "At this rate," the report said, "it will take the United States more than 100 years to

catch up with current Internet speeds in Japan."

If anything, the CWA said, the report overestimated the average U.S. speed. Most of the survey takers, it said, used DSL, a cable modem, or a fiber connection, since it would take too long for dial-up users to take the test, so the results may have been skewed upward.

A key bottleneck is the geographical distribution of high-speed connections. The report found that 57 percent of urban households and 60 percent of suburban households subscribe to broadband, but only 38 percent of rural households.

The division is also economic, with 85 percent of American families earning $100,000 or more having broadband access and 49 percent of families earning $30,000 to $40,000. But only 25 percent of households making less than $20,000 annually have high-speed connections.

The CWA, noting that the U.S. is the only industrialized country without a national policy to promote high-speed access, suggests eight steps.

These include establishing a national policy goal for enough capacity to handle 10 Mbps down and one Mbps up by 2010, developing state and national maps of broadband infrastructure, creating public-private partnerships, reforming universal phone service subsidies to include the Internet, and preserving an open Internet.

New PCs Can Wake Up When They Get Phone Calls

Intel Corp. is unveiling new technology that will let computers wake up from their power-saving sleep state when they receive a phone call over the Internet.

Current computers have to be fully on to receive a call, making them impractical and energy-wasters as replacements for the telephone.

The new component Intel is announcing Thursday will let computers automatically return to a normal, full-powered state when a call comes in. The computer can activate its microphone and loudspeaker to alert the user, then connect the call.

"This certainly helps the PC become a much better center of communications in the home," said Trevor Healy, chief executive of Jajah, which will be the first Internet telephone company to utilize the feature.

The first Intel motherboards with the Remote Wake capability will be shipping in the next month, said Joe Van De Water, director of consumer product marketing for Intel.

These components, which are at the heart of every computer, will most likely be used by smaller computer manufacturers. Bigger names like Dell Inc. and Hewlett-Packard Co. use their own motherboard solutions, but Intel is working to supply them with the technology as well.

The four initial Remote Wake motherboards will be for desktop computers and will need an Internet connection via Ethernet cable, as Wi-Fi doesn’t work in sleep mode.

Van De Water said the computer will know to wake up only for calls from services to which the user has subscribed, so computer-waking prank calls should be impossible.

Mountain View, Calif.-based Jajah is setting itself up as a link between Web companies and the phone system. In April, it signed a deal to become the phone service provider for Yahoo Inc.’s Messenger. Jajah intends to offer the ability to wake up computers to other instant-messaging and Internet voice services, like Google Inc.’s Talk and Microsoft Corp.’s Windows Live Messenger, Healy said. It will be able to wake up subscriber computers both for calls dialed with a number and for those that are directed at a user name.

A fully on desktop PC usually consumes more than 60 watts of power, with many models ranging into the hundreds of watts. In the so-called S3 sleep state, they consume around 10 watts.

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